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SCYLD SCEFING AND HUCK FINN

The instance of divination by shield, sheaf, and candle cited by Chadwick (*Origin of the English Nation*, 278) from the Chronicle of Abingdon in support of his theory that the Scyld story is a mythologizing of the rites of an agricultural cult (a theory supported and re-enforced by Olrik, *Danmarks Heltedigtning* II, 250 ff.) had its analog in Missouri two generations ago, if we may trust the chronicler of *Tom Sawyer*, who specifically vouches in his preface for the authenticity of the folk-lore in the book. When the boys on the island realize that the firing of the gun on the ferry-boat is intended to bring their bodies—for they are believed to be drowned—to the surface, Huck Finn remarks: "They done that last summer, when Bill Turner got drowned; they shoot a cannon over the water, and that makes him come to the top. Yes, and they take loaves of bread and put quicksilver in 'em and set 'em afloat, and wherever there's anything that's drowned, they'll float right there and stop." Tom expresses the belief that it is not in the bread but in "what they say over it before they start it out" that the magic efficacy lies; but he is probably wrong. It is precisely the bread, the staff of life, the modern representative of the medieval sheaf, by which the divination is wrought. The quicksilver in place of the candle seems to be a case of metallurgy displacing medieval devotion.

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BRIEF MENTION

The Well of English, and the Bucket. By Burgess Johnson (Boston, Little, Brown, & Co., 1917). The title of this book is also the title of its first chapter, which is in violation of an obviously fundamental requirement of a good title in each case. The comprehensive title of a treatise cannot logically also be descriptive of a properly marked division of the discussion, and, *vice versa*, a part should not by its name restrict the meaning of the whole. There are six more chapters: Grammar and the Bane of Boyhood; Impression and Expression; Essaying an Essay; The Right not to Laugh; The Every-Day Profanity of Our Best People; Ethics of the Pen;—head-lines these that would not discredit an alert journalist.

Mr. Johnson first attempts an assessment of the responsibility, divided between the schools and the colleges, for the too general failure to train the successive generations of students in the approved use of English. "The college throws the burden for this weakness

back upon the high school, and any teacher of English in any of our American colleges will be able to present an amusing array of exhibits to prove that great numbers of high-school graduates enter the college unable to express themselves clearly or even intelligently in writing." Not dismayed by the connotations of 'commercial value,' Mr. Johnson rightly contends that the "broad, general culture," the boast of the college, should fit a man to meet the practical tests of correctly and clearly written English. This first chapter consists chiefly in an attempt to hold the college to its duty. "If there is something lacking in the elementary training of students, then the college must immediately secure teachers of approved efficiency in teaching more elementary things. Moreover," to continue this passage in which the writer gathers himself together for the expression of what he believes to be the gist of the matter, "if you will agree that an art can best be taught by those who can themselves practice it, other requirements of a good teacher being equal, then have that in mind in selecting instructors." And the final word must be that the college "should turn out artisans, if not artists, in English, competent to handle the most essential tool in the world's workshop—their own language. This it does not at present do."

Prominently in the next chapter, on Grammar, stands the sentence: "Any form of self-expression is an art, not a science. It has no scientific rules of procedure" (p. 36). To use one's vernacular (or an acquired foreign language) is, of course, to practice an art, it is not to indulge in an application of a science; but every art is governed by a code of technicalities, by rules that constitute the science or grammar of the art. The rule of procedure in the practice of a language is to conform to its code of correctness, and the principles of correctness are codified by the scientific grammarian. Every one, therefore, speaking or writing his language is engaged in a practical art, and this practical art is capable of being raised to a higher plane; it then becomes the 'fine art' of literature. The acceptance of these postulates—and they are irrefutable—is all that is required to dispel the pedagogic confusion attending the question of what the schools and colleges should do for the student's English. The theory of education, as it is to be inferred from the methods of instruction, is especially feeble, not to say fundamentally erroneous, with respect to the relation of the art of the vernacular to purely intellectual subjects. What is wanted, and it is a national want of great importance, is the result, the cultural effect, of treating the student's language as a practical art. The subject is an art, and should be inculcated not by a method appropriate, for example, to arithmetic or geography, but by a method analogous to the method of inculcating the practice of a fine art.

The suggestion of an analogy between the acquirement of one's vernacular language and the steps in the training required, for example, to 'read' music instrumentally should give a helpful

view of the method and purpose of school-instruction in English. It is a suggestion, however, that is too subversive of elaborated school-professionalism to be widely adopted. Nor, setting aside the analogy, are the schools—from the primary grades upward into the college—easily persuaded to deal with the pupil's language as with a practical art, altho the question of how this may be done is to be inferred from the method and experiences by which children have been taught to speak while yet too young to enter school. But this is too simple for the over-stimulated mind of the professional pedagog. So important a question must, at least, be kept under discussion, and everywhere teachers convene for this purpose and argue the matter in language that does not uniformly suggest a possible application of the word art. One's language may be stupidly grammatical and yet betray no graceful gesture of mind or of voice.

To make grammar the bane of one's early years is a principal class-room abuse of the subject of English; and the reaction against 'formal grammar' is an unsound and philosophically unworthy reaction against that abuse. The art-method calls for a gradual disclosure of the principles that govern correctness, and it defers to the proper age a study of grammar as the science of the pupil's vernacular art, acquired by a dozen or more years of practice. Prejudice against grammar! It is a prejudice against the laws of the mind; and the argument from all arts is conclusive that it is a prejudice against the principles of art. A member of the editorial staff of a widely circulating periodical—he has charge of the columns devoted to the criticism of poetry—writes in his own hand "would of" (for 'would have'). This is an incredibly excessive illustration of what may, in some instances, be the intellectual preparation for an affected defense of literary art against the invasion of sound grammatical sense.

The Chapters on "Impression and Expression" and "Essaying an Essay" relate chiefly to Mr. Johnson's theories and experiences in teaching composition in college. Seemingly entirely unrelated to what may be conjectured to be the subject of the treatise is the discussion of the sense of humor in the chapter entitled "The Right not to Laugh." The pertinence of the chapter is made clearest, it will be observed, at the end of the book, in one of the author's well-matured and smoothly expressed thoughts: "Prove to me that you are able to write humorously of a man without implying your own superiority to him, and I will grant you at once a place among literary gentlemen." There follows the chapter on profanity, which the author, keeping in his vein, might have entitled 'a cursory essay on swearing.' Here many an undisputed thing is said in a solemn way, but made applicable in a manner specifically pointed: "So gentle reader, I would say to you, if I had arbitrary power over your speech or your written correspondence (the author is

writing at Vassar College), 'This week I will allow you only two *verys*' (may one ask, 'and how many *wills* and *woulds*?').

From the ethics of the tongue the transition is made to the "Ethics of the Pen" (the title of the closing chapter). The author discourses with knowledge and conviction on the primary rules of good conduct in journalism, and thereby gains an effective approach to the rules of good conduct in all forms of writing. Especially good is the discussion of plagiarism, "a question of false labeling"; the true code being "Honest labels on wares honestly secured" (meaning 'got,' 'obtained'). Mr. Johnson is capable of keeping hold of a thought while it leads into fine distinctions; this may be shown by a passage that will also illustrate his style: "There is no unconscious thievery. The interesting coincidences which sometimes do occur . . . do not long mislead the fairminded. There is an atmosphere about real literary theft that is unmistakable when all the arguments are heard. The writer who keeps faith with his reader, giving full credit whenever failure to do so might by any possibility mislead, being frank whenever he distrusts the spontaneity of his own invention, may go ahead with the assurance that honest critics will find little difficulty in distinguishing between crime and coincidence."

J. W. B.

Recollections by John, Viscount Morley (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1917) have been so widely reviewed that any detailed notice here is unnecessary. The primary importance of the book is in the field of political history and its reception has therefore depended in part upon the political tenets of the journals that have commented upon it. Thus the high praise of the liberal London *Nation* must be balanced against the "slashing" notice printed in, and characteristic of, *The Saturday Review*. The reminiscences of Lord Morley's terms as Chief Secretary for Ireland and of the part that he played in the decision with regard to the choice of a successor to Mr. Gladstone in 1894 are of profound interest; not less so is the publication of his letters as Secretary for India to the Viceroy, Lord Minto, during the critical period of the planning and inception of reforms in the Indian government in the direction of increased native responsibility. The publication of these letters so shortly after the event and at so critical a period in English history is, however, one would think, an astonishing indiscretion which, strangely enough, reviewers have passed over in silence. Time has not yet put to the test the real value of Lord Morley's Indian reforms; competent authorities aver that the decision to attempt nothing extreme has resulted in a half-way policy from which little good can come; and, be that as it may, these letters (printed *without* Lord Minto's replies) afford dangerous fuel to any incendiary who cares to avail himself of them. With the exception of one or two veiled suggestions Lord Morley makes no

comment upon the present catastrophe or upon England's share in the responsibility for it. But his book—the sub-title of which might well be “The Theory and Practice of Liberalism”—is an object-lesson in the need of conciliation, compromise, sympathy and understanding in the difficult art of governing men.

Lord Morley's place in literature is that of one whose endeavour it was to bridge over the solution of continuity made by the Romantic Reaction and carry on the rationalistic tendencies of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. In his various volumes and essays on the revolutionary thinkers and statesmen of France he is thus a corrective to Carlyle. In an editorial capacity, especially during the years when he directed the *Fortnightly Review*, he played an influential part in the struggle between free thought and dogma. In his old age he now looks back upon the controversies of other years with serene satisfaction and apparently without a recognition of the part played by the men who were his allies in exalting a materialistic standard that prepared the way for future disaster. The humaneness, philanthropy, positivism of the later Victorian period is brought up into the high light; the darker tendencies involved in acceptance of theories of “race-preservation” and the like are ignored. In no mood of apology but rather with proud confidence in the verdict of history he surveys the achievement of his generation.

There is a pictorial quality almost Clarendonian in the character-drawings scattered through the *Recollections*. Mill, Meredith, Spencer, Renan, Arnold, Stephen and others, and in the world of politics, among many more, most notably Chamberlain and Harcourt, are vividly portrayed. Even more delightful are the literary “interludes,” if one may so style them, that break in upon the political chronicle and mark periods of refreshment in Morley's official life. Among these the long meditation on Lucretius (ii, 118 f.) is especially noteworthy. Throughout the book one gets the impression of a mind that has “known the best that has been thought and said in the world”; the whole range of letters is covered, not only in the aptly chosen and often recondite mottoes to the various chapters, but in allusion and chance suggestion on any page of the text. There is no laborious effort to appear learned; rather it is the spontaneous overflow of a mind steeped in the best. With the mere attainment of such knowledge Morley is not satisfied; the true devotee of Culture in the wide sense in which Arnold employs the word applies it practically; his aim is more than to know the best that has been thought and said; he must “make it prevail.” Such an ideal Lord Morley has had ever before his eyes.

But the highest commendation that he deserves comes to him from the quality and diversity of his friendships. The most trusted associate of Gladstone's later years, the intimate friend of George Meredith, preserving unbroken the personal ties that bound him to Joseph Chamberlain despite the triple break over Home Rule, the

Boer War, and the Tariff,—Lord Morley is a shining example of those philosophers who, in the words of Gibbon, “maintain their arguments without losing their temper, and assert their freedom without violating their friendship.”

S. C. C.

Simplest Spoken French (84 pages plus a 25 page vocabulary) by W. F. Giese and Barry Cerf of the University of Wisconsin, published by Henry Holt & Co., has the merit of utility, for soldier and civilian alike. The strictly military feature is confined to a short list of terms placed near the end of the book, the attitude of the authors being “that those who study French with a view to service abroad are not going to need primarily a military vocabulary, but will require above all a command of everyday French.” French pronunciation is briefly treated, with additional aid offered by specially devised phonetic symbols used throughout the vocabularies. Now, as this book is intended for schools and colleges as well as for training camps, it would seem ill-conceived to discard the international phonetic transcription in favor of a system that has little, if any advantage, over the standard. Besides, the employment of the italic vowel to represent the nasal sound and likewise the use of the accented phonogram tend to confuse the mind of the learner. The treatment of the grammar *abrégé* is praiseworthy; the irregular verbs given are confined to those in most common use; and the brief sentences in the dialogues are sprightly and idiomatic, such as a tyro might conceivably handle with ease. Naturally, there are no set exercises, but frequent drills are suggested for varying on the use of pronoun, verb, etc., in each conversation preceding. This clear presentation gives an impression of the union of method and motive undiscoverable in many of the books put forth under the spur of the present crisis, to which are now to be added the following:

War French, prepared by Col. Cornélis de Witt Willcox, Professor of Modern Languages at the U. S. Military Academy, West Point, and published by the Macmillan Co., containing chapters in English on French institutions, civil and military, a brief treatment of French grammar, conversations, chiefly on military matters, and a complete vocabulary.

French for Soldiers (130 pages) by Arthur F. Whittem and Percy W. Long, published by the Harvard University Press. It gives the elements of French grammar, selected passages from the French Military Manual, with an interlinear translation for the aid of beginners, and a number of examples of the picturesque slang of the *poulu*. The collaboration of the officers of the Military Mission and of Captain Baldensperger, now exchange professor at Columbia University, assures the authority and accuracy of this little book.

R. A. S.